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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the importance of the CIVITAS@Prague meeting in June 1995. The conference provided a much-needed look at the role of education in the future of world peace. This international conference of educators is likely to affect world history in the obvious ways that international meetings of diplomatic, military, or financial leaders do since it underscores the role that civic education can play in promoting democracy and peace in the world. Explanations are given about the significance of the term "civitas" and of the location of the meeting in Prague (Czechoslovakia). The paper explores the contributions of the National Standards for Civics and Government, and its predecessor volume: "CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education." The organizing questions and topics needed in civics education courses and how undergraduate education needs to address the need for civic education at the university level also are examined. (EH)

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A New Meaning for "World-Class Standards" in Education

by
R. Freeman Butts

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THE HOOVER INSTITUTION
STANFORD UNIVERSITY
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CIVITAS@PRAGUE/1995 Viewed from Afar:- A New Meaning for "World-Class Standards" in Education

by

R. Freeman Butts

For more than a decade, the idea of raising the academic achievement of American students to the level of "world-class standards" in core subjects has been widely accepted by educators and the public alike. But since the 1994 November election, the bi-partisan idea behind national education goals and standards, approved first by Congress and President Bush in an act called "America 2000" and then by Congress and President Clinton in "Goals 2000," has come under assault.

Criticism has been fueled as a result of controversies over the proposed National Standards in United States History and an explosion of fears about unwarranted federal intrusion into the affairs of states, local communities, and individuals. Despite this apparent retreat from the idea of national standards in some of the core subjects, the National Standards for Civics and Government has acquired widespread public and professional acceptance not only in the United States but in many parts of the world.

In fact, an international event in early June gave promise that this highly regarded set of national standards can promote long term peace and security in the world as well as the domestic public good in the United States. On June 2-6, more than 400 educational and political leaders from 52 countries met at a conference called CIVITAS@Prague.1995 where the National Standards for Civics and Government and its predecessor volume, CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education, were centerpieces of much favorable attention and discussion.

As a newsworthy media event, the Prague conference could not rival the international celebrations being held this spring and summer in connection with the 50th anniversaries of the ending of World War II or the founding of the United Nations, but it provides a much needed look at the role of education in the future of world peace. And there are few times when an international conference of educators is likely to affect world history in the obvious ways that international meetings of diplomatic, military, or financial leaders do. But, in the long run, the Prague conference may be just such a meeting, as it underscores the role that civic education can play in promoting democracy and peace in the world.

We must not underestimate the democratic values that enabled the citizens of Europe and America to endure and eventually to prevail in the struggles against totalitarianism in the 20th century. Nor should we ignore the many ways that democratic peoples rely on education to promote and sustain the civic virtues of obligation for the public good, freedom of individual rights, justice, equality, diversity, truth, and patriotism.

The theme of the Prague conference was "Strengthening Citizenship and Civic Education, East and West." Its purpose was to enable educators from many parts of the world to learn from each other how to design systems of civic education that will foster those democratic values under assault for decades from Nazism and Communism in the East and are threatened even now in some of the the older democracies of the West.

We all need all the help we can acquire from and give to each other, not only for insuring domestic tranquility but also for promoting international peace and security. To these ends, I believe a major step was undertaken by CIVITAS@Prague.1995.

Why Civitas? Why Prague?

Civitas is a perfectly good, if unfamiliar, word carried into English directly from the Latin. It refers (a) to the organized body of citizens and institutions constituting a republican form of government and (b) to the ideas, values, rights, and responsibilites that citizens of a republic hold in common. The French Revolution produced a related word, even less familiar, which has come into English as "civism," which has come to mean the principles of good citizenship in a democratic republic.

Happily, the conference picked up the term civitas from the volume entitled CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education published in 1991 by the Los Angeles based Center for Civic Education. It was an appropriate term to be applied to a conference composed of representatives from countries whose names and politics ranged from Albania to Uzbekistan - including Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia in between. It symbolized that the peoples of the East could peacefully seek to redefine a common meaning for democratic civitas and civism in the 21at centuryand try to design a civic education suitable to their differing histories and cultures .

At the same time, the United States is engaged in a national debate of monumental proportions regarding the role of government, and especially of the federal government, in the lives of individual citizens This struggle is

epitomized in the present budget debates in Congress and in recent Supreme Court decisions pertaining to the meaning of "federalism" in health care, welfare, immigration, religious values, violence and crime, juvenile justice, and, not least, public education itself.

Why Prague?

The peoples of Central and Eastern European countries have suffered for decades the known tyrannies of Nazism and Communism and of recurring terrorisms. What can we learn from them? Have we tried hard enough to learn how democracy can overcome tyranny and how democracy can be defended against terrorism?

The city of Prague is especially pertinent for two reasons. While Prague suffered repeatedly from political, religious, and authoritarian depredations, it is also the home of the civic dissident movement that eventually led to the successful "Velvet Revolution" of 1989-90 against Communist authority in Czechoslovakia. Marked by a minimum of violence, it was a heartening symbol of the peaceful achievement of democracy in the post-cold-war world. Significantly, the key political organization in that movement was called the Civic Forum, whose preeminent spokesman was President Vaclav Havel, who opened the CIVITAS conference in Prague with a welcoming message.

Earlier, in his address to a joint session of Congress in February 1990, President Havel argued "that no amount of economic assistance will make a totalitarian country more prosperous unless it is made more democratic." A month later, his point was reinforced by Czechoslovakia's Ambassador to the U. S. and Civic Forum activist, Rita Klimova, who told the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship in Washington that Czechoslovakia was primarily asking for "aid in the area of education for democracy."

There could scarcely be a better keynote for the role of CIVITAS@Prague.1995 than those words of Havel and Klimova, urging the international promotion of a viable civic education for democracy. In a notable address at Harvard's Commencement on June 8, President Havel returned to the theme that the main task of coexistence in a world civiliztion is "a radical renewal of our sense of responsibility," which is the central task of a civic education for all educators and all leaders in all countries.

There is another historical reason, little known in the United States, for holding the CIVITAS conference in Prague. In a way, it fulfills a dream of

"world-class standards" in education envisioned more than 300 years ago by the Moravian bishop, John Amos Comenius. His name is memorialized in the Comenius Centre for Education and Democracy, initiated in 1992 at an international conference jointly organized by the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education. Now affiliated with Charles University in Prague, its aim is to promote and support education for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

American educators who have studied the history of education will recognize the name and contributions of Comenius who, along with other Protestant Reformation leaders, urged the building of complete systems of public education to help achieve order and security in countries left in ruins on a continent ravaged by the religious, ethnic, and nationalistic conflicts of the Thirty Years' War.

Comenius is usually cited in the history of education for writing a series of graded textbooks profusely illustrated to promote the learning of language through pictures, accompanied by definitions in Latin as well as in various vernacular tongues (an early form of biligual teaching). But even more interesting, Comenius antedated our contemporary calls for world-class standards in education by proposing an outlook called *pansophism*, i.e., teaching a common body of universal knowledge to all children everywhere that could pave the road to universal peace in a war-torn world. He envisioned a universal system of schools in which the whole human race could be educated, including all ages, all social classes, both sexes, and all nations: a truly universal education (*panpaedia*).

Obviously, the world of nations was not ready for Comenius' vision in the 17th century, nor is it today. But the idea that public education should promote the common political, intellectual, and social bonds necessary for democratic civic culture and government to flourish in different nations has begun to take hold in many areas of the world since the end of the cold war in the late 1980s. This effort could be a giant step forward in redefining "world-class standards" in education, a phrase often used to apply to achievement primarily in science and mathematics as tools by which America can achieve a sharper edge in world economic competition. "World-class standards" in civics might now become a more powerful means by which the schools and universities of democratic nations could more directly contribute to the common goals of world peace and security.

World-class standards in civic education could also aid in redefining the meaning of international education, which has had a number of different

faces in the course of the past 300 years. Education was a handmaiden of Western missionaries who pursued their "civilizing mission" in Africa and Asia in the18th and 19th centuries. It was a major tool of Western imperialism and colonialism throughout the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And it was viewed as a primary aid to the "modernization" process of underdeveloped countries envisioned by foreign technical assistance programs since the middle of the 20th century. The motif now, however, is a "partnership" among would-be democratic nations, all seeking to promote the principles of democratic citizenship, a *pancivism* if you please, aimed at achieving the welfare and security of free and equal peoples everywhere.

There is a special urgency for the United States in this task as we Americans face the threats of domestic violence and terrorism and their challenges to our own democracy. We must be careful to preserve our historic constitutional protections of civil liberties even as we seek new ways to combat increasingly savage and mindless violence and terrorism.

This is the nub of the argument for civic education in all democracies: - to provide for all citizens a foundation of accurate knowledge and reason upon which a constitutional democracy and its democratic civic culture must rest. This is exactly what the National Standards for Civics and Government and CIVITAS have tried to do for the United States and what the Prague conference set out to do internationally.

Now that the U.S. National Standards for Civics and Government and CIVITAS have received international recognition at the Prague conference, it behooves American professional educators and the American public to take civic education seriously in every aspect of our own educational effort.

It is now generally agreed that civics and government should be regarded as a core study for all students from kindergarten through high school. In addition, I argued in an article entitled "Antidote for Antipolitics" (Education Week, Jan. 18, 1995) as follows:

> "...I also believe that civics and government should be included in the "challenging subject matter" of preservice teacher education and continuing professional development. That would enable all teachers not only to teach "an increasingly diverse student population" but also to promote the cohesive values and principles underlying American constitutional democracy, no matter what their specialized teaching fields may be.

"This means that all of the national and state groups now at work to improve the accrediting of institutions and licensing and assessment of teachers should emphasize the civic foundations of education as one of the major objectives by which all teachers are prepared ... For example, standards are now being developed by a task force of the Council of Chief State School Officers, by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, by the new "National Commission on Teaching and America's Future," and by the "New Professional Teacher Project" of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

"All of these agencies should be paying greater attention to the civic foundations of education. Only in this way will all teachers be enabled to prepare all of their students for "responsible citizenship" ...Only in this way will lasting success in educational reform be achieved and reforms in teacher education connected with certification and accreditation....

"In other words, all teachers, as well as teachers of civics, government, and social studies, need better grounding in the challenging knowledge set forth in CIVITAS and in the National Standards for Civics and Government.

"As for the study of civics and government itself, the sweeping changes of the recent election at federal, state, and local levels were often based on a protest against government itself and promises to reduce and limit government. This provides a unique window of opportunity for the study of civics to shed its perception by many students as the most boring of school subjects and become one of the most important and "challenging" subjects in the K-12 curriculum...

"And there is a still wider political dimension to the usefulness of the National Civics Standards. In his column "Turning Cynicism into Citizenship," (Washington Post (11/27/94) David Broder called attention to the Civics Standards as a school-based effort to achieve the participatory goals of several grass roots citizenship movements: the National Civic League's 'Alliance for National Renewal,' the Bradley Foundation's 'The New Citizenship Movement,' and the American Civic Forum's 'Call for a New Citizenship.'

"The Civics Standards have come at just the right time to bridge a possible gap between these community movements and the schoolrooms. In the long run, one cannot succeed without the other.

"In sum, if community participation is genuinely to

promote the democratic values and principles of constitutional democracy, it must be linked (1) with the civic knowledge and values that students acquire in schools through CIVITAS and the National Civics Standards and (2) with the civic knowledge and values that teachers acquire in their liberal arts and professional preparation."

Colleges and universities all over the country are looking once again at the core requirements for their general offerings for liberal arts degrees. They range from the venerable Contemporary Civilization course begun in 1918 at Columbia to the required program in CIV (Cultures, Ideas, and Values) reformulated at Stanford in 1988. In fact, I once suggested that Stanford"s CIV program should offer an experimental track in which the School of Education should collaborate with the Arts and Humanities faculty in developing a track that could be dubbed CIVICS to stand for Cultures, Ideas, and Values in Commuities and Schools. The goal would be a healthy balance between the values of cultural diversity and political cohesion by viewing the liberal arts as civic arts and teaching as a civic profession.

Indeed, the opportunity now arises in the fall of 1995 to make civitas a fundamental element in brand new experiments in undergraduate residential learning communities in such diverse circumstances as the inauguration of the Bradley Learning Community at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the entire first class at the new California State University-Monterey Bay.

Guidelines for a core course for undergraduae students could well be found in CIVITAS: A Framework for Civic Education, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. It was developed and reviewed by a large number of scholars in the fields of history, political science, constitutional law, and education, and published under the leadership of the Center for Civic Education in 1991. In effect, CIVITAS is a major scholarly basis for answering the questions raised in the National Standards for Civics and Government (1994).I have long argued that active community experiences for high school and college students should be based upon and informed by substantive study of the underlying ideas and institutions of democracy. For example, the four major topics in CIVITAS include:

I. Civic Virtue

Fundamental Values and Principles of Constitutional Democracy

II. Civic Participation

Civic and Community Action

Methods of Instruction for Participation
III. Civic Knowledge and Skills
The Nature of Politics and Government
Formal and Informal Institutions of Government
IV. The Role of the Citizen
Rights and Responsibilities

I am, of course, not proposing that such a course should be a textbook/lecture course, but I have had just enough experience with the Internet to be put off by the wandering discussions that can ensue when participants do not have some sort of common framework of reading or of ideas to provide a basis for disciplined analysis, discussion, and thought to inform an enthusiastic commitment and involvement. CIVITAS has the advantage that every topic includes a conceptual perspective, an historical perspective, and a contemporary perspective of the subject under consideration..

Smilarly the National Standards for Civics and Government sets forth five major organizing questions:

I. What Is Government and What Should It Do?
II. What Are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy?
III. How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?
IV. What Is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?
V. What Are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

These are remarkably timely and important questions for serious study in school and college just as the very foundations of American government itself are undergoing historic debate - in Congress, in the Supreme Court, at state and community levels , not to speak of daily talk shows and murder trials on radio, TV, and the Internet. A study program centering on the questions raised by the National Civics Standards and the substantive scholarship outlined in CIVITAS could be intellectually rigorous as well as stimulating to students who can see them as issues that affect their immediate lives as well as their futures.

For example, in its recent decision on term limits for Congress, the Supreme Court faced the very questions debated by the Founders as to whether we are a people of 50 sovereign states or of one nation. Other Court cases and debates in Congress and in legislatures deal with whether the

federal government can outlaw guns in schools, fund abortions for teenagers, assign college scholarships on the basis of minority status, require community service for graduation or forbid it as "involuntary servitude," promote prayers in public schools, provide public vouchers or tax credits for parents who choose to send their children to private and religious schools, maintain or change affirmative action programs in colleges and universities and employment, restrict immigration, etc., etc.

I believe that such a course would not only arouse the immediate interest of students but could provide a "central seminar" or core course for all undergraduate students as well as those who are engaging in different kinds of community or campus service. It could serve as an educational policy course (or social foundations of education course) for students who are seeking a variety of teaching credentials.

There is also much that can be learned from programs and ideas discussed in the journals of the Kettering Foundation: The Civic Arts Review: A Journal Relating Liberal Education and Public Life, the Higher Education Exchange, and the Kettering Review. See also such programs of community participation as those at the Walt Whitman Center at Rutgers, the Hubert Humphrey Center at Minnesota, the Maxwell School at Syracuse, the Haas Center at Stanford, and, of course, Americorps.

Above all, I hope that undergraduate education will give at least as much attention to degree programs that will lead students to public and government careers as it does to careers in the private sectors of business, labor, agriculture, or non-profit enterprise. No matter what kind of occupation or work may be the goal of different students, a preparaton for their common career in the "office of citizen" is of the utmost importance for the United States in the coming decades. Without such background of knowledge, citizens of the United States as well as those of other countries in the East and in the West, will continue to live at the mercy of populist unreason as well as uninformed fear of government tyranny.

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Explanatory notes about the Prague confernce and CIVNET.

The Prague conference brought together about 415 representatives of education, government, and non-governmental organizations from more than 50 countries to deal not only with the reform of civic education in schools and universities but also the role that the media and the Internet can play in promoting democratic participation.

The Conference Steering Committee for the Prague conference included agencies long engaged in international civic education: the Center for Civic Education, the AFT Education Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, the Social Studies Development Center of Indiana University, the Mershon Center of the Ohio sate University, and the National Council for Economic Education.

Many of the organizations represented at the Prague conference have worked with each other in improving civic education in their respective nation's schools and universities over the past decade or two. These bi-lateral efforts have served good purposes, but it is clear that schools need the favoring partnership of government, the private sector, and a vibrant civic culture, if democracy is genuinely to be achieved in the lives of citizens in nations around the world.

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Information Agency provided logistical support in organizing the conference. The plan was to develop electronic resources for the launching of CIVNET, a world-wide e-mail network for easy communication and sharing of experience and research, all dedicated to civic education for democratic renewal.

The new CIVNET can be found on the World Wide Web at http://ericir.syr.edu/civnet and the Prague Conference itself can be found on the WWW at http://ericir.syr.edu:80/civnet/1995/html

The conference was held in the new headquarters of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, formerly the Parliament building overlooking Wenceslaus Square, where thousands upon thousands of demonstrators demanded and won democratic freedom in November 1989.